CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for establishing an overlay network of collaborative conference servers for use in a multi-participant conference, the method comprising:
establishing a plurality of collaborative conference servers;
connecting at least two of the conference servers directly to at least two separate conference participants; and
using each one of the directly connected conference servers to simultaneously provide audio mixing for its directly attached participant.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising managing at least two of the conference servers using at least two separate service providers.

3. The method of claim 1, further comprising establishing a controllable voice packet routing path through the overlay network.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of establishing a controllable voice packet routing path further comprises connecting once and only once to every conference server that is directly attached to a participant.

5. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of establishing a controllable voice packet routing path further comprises directing all of the voice data packets through the overlay network.

6. The method of claim 3, further comprising dynamically modifying the voice routing path during the multi-participant conference including transferring one or more participants from a first conference server to a second conference server,

adding one or more conference servers to the overlay network and removing one or more existing conference servers from the overlay network.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising setting the output from one of the connected conference servers to the connected participant equal to the sum of all inputs to that connected conference server except an input associated with that connected participant.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of establishing a plurality of conference servers comprises:
identifying an available set of conference servers;
communicating an internet protocol address and a path delay time for each one of the conference servers among the connected conference participants;
communicating the addresses and delay times of conference servers from each participant to its directly connected conference server.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of connecting at least two of the conference servers directly to at least two separate conference participants further comprises:
associating a first conference server with a contact number associated with the multi-participant conference;
connecting a first and second conference participant to the first conference server using the contact number;
using the first conference server to identify a second conference server;
transferring the second conference participant to the second conference server.

10. A computer readable medium containing a computer executable code that when read by a computer causes the computer to perform method for establishing an

overlay network of collaborative conference servers for use in a multi-participant conference, the method comprising:

establishing a plurality of collaborative conference servers;

connecting at least two of the conference servers directly to at least two separate conference participants; and

using each one of the directly connected conference servers to simultaneously provide audio mixing for its directly attached participant.

11. The computer readable medium of claim 10, wherein the method further comprises managing at least two of the conference servers using at least two separate service providers.

12. The computer readable medium of claim 10, wherein the method further comprises establishing a controllable voice packet routing path through the overlay network.

13. The computer readable medium of claim 12, wherein the step of establishing a controllable voice packet routing path further comprises connecting once and only once to every conference server that is directly attached to a participant.

14. The computer readable medium of claim 12, wherein the step of establishing a controllable voice packet routing path further comprises directing all of the voice data packets through the overlay network.

15. The computer readable medium of claim 12, wherein the method further comprises dynamically modifying the voice routing path during the multi-participant conference including transferring one or more participants from a first conference server to a second conference server, adding one or more conference

servers to the overlay network and removing one or more existing conference servers from the overlay network.

16. The computer readable medium of claim 10, wherein the method further comprises setting the output from one of the connected conference servers to the connected participant equal to the sum of all inputs to that connected conference server except an input associated with that connected participant.

17. The computer readable medium of claim 10, wherein the step of establishing a plurality of conference servers comprises:
identifying an available set of conference servers;
communicating an internet protocol address and a path delay time for each one of the conference servers among the connected conference participants;
communicating the addresses and delay times of conference servers from each participant to its directly connected conference server.

18. The computer readable medium of claim 10, wherein the step of connecting at least two of the conference servers directly to at least two separate conference participants further comprises:
associating a first conference server with a contact number associated with the multi-participant conference;
connecting a first and second conference participant to the first conference server using the contact number;
using the first conference server to identify a second conference server;
transferring the second conference participant to the second conference server.

19. The computer readable medium of claim 10, wherein the step of establishing a plurality of collaborative conference servers further comprises establishing a plurality of collaborative session initiation protocol conference servers.

20. A system for providing multi-participant conferencing, the system comprising an overlay network of conference servers arranged to collaboratively host the multi-party conference, the overlay network comprising a plurality of conference servers, each conference server directly attached to at least one conference participant and arranged to supply audio mixing for the directly attached participant, wherein all of the conference servers provide audio mixing for directly attached participants simultaneously.